

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON
MIDDLE EASTERN AMERICAN AFFAIRS**

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, February 26, 2009

Time: 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Place: Cranford/Graves Fire Services Building
6820 Webster Street
Landover Hills, Maryland

Present: Chair Anwer Hasan, Rudwan Abu-rumman, Durriya Bandani, Riad Dakheel, Miriam Galston, Irma Hafeez, Farzaneh Riar, Nadia Sawaya, Julian H. Spirer, Ibrahim Uyar

Absent: Bilal M. Ayyub, Zahid H. Bukhari, Dorreya (Didi) Elmenshawy, Sayad Hassan, Majid R. Mirza, Murat Ozer, Rafi Rone, Khalil A. Zaied, Yonathan (Yoni) Zohar

Staff Present: Iman Awad, Agnes M. Smith

I. Call to Order and Greetings

The meeting was called to order at 6:55 p.m. by Chair Anwer Hasan. Chair Hasan welcomed the Commissioners, staff and guest.

II. Review Minutes October 30th and December 9th

Motion to accept October 30 and December 9, 2008 Minutes: Commissioner Miriam Galston

Seconded Motion to accept October 30 and December 9, 2008 Minutes:
Commissioner Rudwan Abu-rumman

Minutes approved by Commission

III. GOCI Staff Update

Chair Hasan informed the Commission that Special Assistant Iman Awad has been doing several things such as reaching out to the embassies, working on a special business conference, etc.

Special Assistant Awad said that she met with students from Loyola, John Hopkins, Towson, Notre Dame and Morgan to have Halal food available at campuses. She also informed the Commission that she met with the Embassy of Egypt and they are interested in a business conference. Special Assistant Awad also met with the Department of Aging that have a 5 Wishes Program which is the first living will that talks about your personal, emotional and spiritual needs as well as your medical wishes. This booklet is offered in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, etc. Special Assistant Awad also told the Commission, that she met with the Baltimore Luxor-Alexandria Sister City Committee (BLASCC) who is very active. The BLASCC just came back from a mission. The trip provided the BLASCC an opportunity to combine a health mission, a cultural mission, a historical first mayoral visit and accommodate a large group of distinguished travelers. They have offered any help to the Commission for the Sister-State relationships. She is continually working on the Business Conference scheduled for June 10, 2009 to be held at the University of Maryland Riggs Center. She also asked the Commission to help find out who the interested parties were in the community. Need to know where the businesses are.

IV. Business Development

Chair Hasan spoke about a disparity study to include Middle Eastern minority firms. He met with Wendell Sutton and was informed that the Maryland Department of Transportation has already started the process of hiring a consultant. Chair Hasan informed the Commission that they need to give data information on the social and economic disadvantages of these individuals. He also spoke on the Business Conference being a huge challenge. The purpose of the conference is to establish creditability. The Middle Eastern Chamber of Commerce is in place so funds can be collected and disbursed. There is a need for the Commission to push this project forward. He would like to have a job fair at the same time as the business conference. Chair Hasan asked that each committee e-mail Special Assistant Awad on their activities. Chair Hasan gave an update on the Sister State progress with Abu Dhabi. A lot of progress is being done. Two weeks ago he spoke with Secretary of State John McDonough who informed him that he was going to find a serious partner. He will find out the status and once this is put in place will pursue other countries. He also met with the ambassador of Qatar in December. He was very excited about the Commission and the business conference. This meeting with the ambassador was with the Governor and the Secretary of State. He indicated that there are a lot of companies in Qatar who want to bring their businesses and funds to Maryland. This information was passed on to DBED. He is to meet with Bob Walker of DBED in the near future.

There was a question about the difference between the Sister City/Sister State relationships. The difference is that the Sister City concept is that the city or the county deals with cities and the Sister State deals with states. Abu Dhabi is a state and it has seven cities. The Sister State relationships can only be done with providence such as Egypt, Jordan or any other state in the Middle East. They want the Governor to be the same level of relationship as the providence.

There was a question about the need for the conference. The need is for someone to take the responsibility for getting out the flyers, invitations, etc. Also, have a team of individuals who are reaching out to the businesses who will be ready to sponsor. The money must come from the private sector. According to the estimates there needs to be \$50,000 or \$70,000 raised. The cost to have a full day conference at the Riggs Center will be \$40,000 to \$50,000. All of the planning for the conference has been done such as the venue, cost, how many sponsors needed, program, etc.

Commissioner Irma Hafeez asked if the Commissioners are members of the Chamber of Commerce. Chair Hasan answered that Commissioners are not automatic members. There is a fee to be a member of the Chamber of Commerce. As the Commission there is a need for support of the Chamber of Commerce. The Commission cannot have a bank account or collect any funds. If the Commission wanted to schedule a trip for government officials to go to the Middle Eastern countries, it would be very difficult for the Commission. However, with the Chamber of Commerce existing they can facilitate and organize the trip while the Commission can get the goals, etc.

There was a question as to whether there is a limitation as to how many Sister State groups the Commission can have. Chair Hasan answered that there is no limitation with the countries. However there is a limitation with the Secretary of State's office. The Commission has a limitation that they need to establish a 5-6 individual Sister State group.

V. Peace Zone

Commissioner Julian Spirer spoke about the peace zone being a place where businesses owned by nationals of Middle Eastern countries that are in historical confutation mode can co-locate to a greater environment of cooperation and collaboration. It should be a place that is very attractive for investment by nationals of these states. It should be close to foreign trade zones and an enterprise zone so that it gets all the potential benefits that Maryland offers to businesses investing in the United States. Commissioner Spirer said that there is in place already a zone that seems to meet these requirements. It also has the benefit of being very close to Washington, D.C. so that it has the certain cache called Capitol Heights owned by a company called Steeple Chase, but administrated by the Prince George's County Economic Development Commission. It is about 60 acres and is right off the beltway at the exit called Ritchie Marlboro Road. They have a minimum rental of 20,000 square feet at this time that hopefully can be reduced to attract smaller businesses.

There was a brief discussion about the Maryland Peace Zone Initiative.

Chair Hasan spoke about a motion as to whether to accept or not accept this initiative. Commissioner Ibrahim Uyar asked if the motion for the Maryland Peace Zone Initiative can be done electronically.

Motion to vote electronically for the Maryland Peace Zone Initiative: Commissioner Rudwan Abu-rumman

Seconded motion to vote electronically for the Maryland Peace Zone Initiative: Commissioner Durriya Bandani and Commissioner Irma Hafeez

Motion approved by Commission

VI. Community Development

Commissioner Riad Dakheel informed the Commission that the Community Development Committee had a conference call and discussed Census 2010 and the Health Conference Project.

Census 2010

Mr. Franklin Jackson, Jr., U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau

Mr. Franklin Jackson, Jr. spoke to the Commission about 2010 Census. The Census strategy is to count everyone, count them once and count them in the right place. The Constitution requires a census every 10 years to determine the number of representatives to Congress for each state based on the population. The Census data is also used for projects and services for transportation, public works, economic development, public health, emergency preparedness, education, and senior services, among others. The first Census was in 1790. Census 2000 was the best Census ever in terms of response rate. Maryland receives \$1,000 per person per year for the Census, which is \$10,000 over a ten year period. Maryland loses this amount for every person not counted.

Mr. Jackson also informed the Commission about the confidentiality of the information provided to the Census. The Census cannot share personal information with ANYONE, not even with other federal or law enforcement agencies. The Census Bureau strips all identifying information and publishes only summary data.

Mr. Jackson told the Commission that the Census Bureau wants them to take ownership of the Census for the community. The Census Bureau wants to establish partnerships to help get the word out, by forming Complete Count Committees. These committees will help the Census figure out the best way to approach the community. Mr. Jackson asked the Commission to make sure the community is informed. He told the Commission that they should expect an advance letter, questionnaire and reminder postcard. If the questionnaire is not completed, you will receive a visit from a Census Enumerator.

Mr. Jackson said that the Census has also started a program called Census in Schools. There is a website for teachers, students and parents. There are also lesson plans, newsletters, flyers and take home materials for students. The goal is to get students from K-12 excited about the Census so they can take this information home and get

their parents excited. School events are held to encourage participation in Census 2010.

Mr. Jackson told the Commission for more information they can go to the Census website: www.census.gov.

Chair Hasan thanked Mr. Jackson for his presentation and asked if the program that the Census has for the schools is the same as the programs for religious groups/faith based. Mr. Jackson informed the Commission that there is not a faith based initiative but that there are some things that a faith based group can do. Commissioner Miriam Galson said that when it comes to the undocumented having really strong contact with religious groups that the word needs to be spread that there is no risk/danger to be counted.

Mr. Mike Lettre, Maryland Department of Planning

Mr. Mike Lettre informed the Commission that the Census is a national enterprise done uniformly throughout the country with much of the same framework. The Census is going to cost between 13-16 Billion Dollars, which is over \$50 per person. The Census is also pretty active although in Census 2000 considered on of the best, 3 million people was counted twice and 6 million people were missed. The Census is really after the undercounted which is the ethnic groups. What Maryland is doing is strictly volunteering. They are not getting paid by the federal government to do the Census. There will be very little monies filtering down from the federal operations. A lot of what Maryland is doing for the Census will be from networking and outreach. The Governor has approved a network plan that will get out two people and build the relationships to reach out to the community households. All of the representatives of that partnership are within the Maryland State government. He represents the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), Linda Janey, Assistant Secretary of MDP, David Lee, Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI), Rick Morris, Secretary of State are team members. Also Mr. Jackson is a member. There will be Complete Count Committees locally largely formed by local elective officials in municipalities and counties as well as interest community groups. Mr. Lettre told the commission that the Census is about two things, distribution of dollars and distribution of political power. The Constitutional mandate for the Census is about elective representative in this country with the concept of one person one vote. The distribution of political power is the key and obviously the influence of some large and growing ethnic groups in the country. He spoke about the Census address canvassing where a questionnaire is mailed to your housing unit so they have to have an address. The Census initiated the first navigation system. The first electronic map came from the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau has a mapping system called Tiger which is the first digital street file with addresses. Every address is located in reference to its location on street segment, which is the key to counting everyone and counting them in the right place. Maryland submitted over 120,000 new addresses to the Census Bureau that was not in the file about 6 months ago based largely on new development. It also includes counting special places as assistant living, college

dormitories, prisons, detention facilities, etc. Everyone is counted where they reside. This is a count of everyone, not a citizenship count. Mr. Lettre informed the Commission that in other countries the Census does not have the same privacy aspects as the U.S. Census. There is a Title 12 that guarantees and has a fine of over \$250,000 if a Census employee ever releases information that identifies an individual. There is a strong penalty financially and a five year prison term. It is secure in ways that is not the same in other countries so people that have participated in censuses in other countries may not realize that. The message of easy, safe and important is the key. He also informed the Commission that there are opportunities as to how race is reported, you can report more than one race and also to do a write in. There are some ways that if you are not happy with actually how the questions are worded, you can make some improvements. Mr. Lettre said that the race question issue will be reexamined for the 2020 Census. Mr. Lettre also told the Commission about the inter-active mapping systems that have a series of maps including language spoken at home maps and you can find out small geographical areas. You can enter your address and get information about the Census tract in which you live as it relates to counting.

Commissioner Nadia Sawaya gave an update about the Health Conference project. The conference is to bring in community health organization as well as government agencies to have a forum to collaborate and address some of the issues in the community in reference to accessing healthcare. There is a draft program available. Also, Commissioner Rafi Rone has been very helpful in obtaining a sponsorship with Life Bridge Health System in assisting the Commission with the conference with regard to location, staff support and promoting the event. She and Commissioner Rone met last month to discuss some topics of interest for the conference. The concept is basically to work on culture, understanding the language, access to health care, focus on patient care, etc. The tentative date for the program is June 10, 2009. There will be representatives from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Census Bureau, community leaders, hospital representatives, governmental, community and health organizations. Commissioner Sawaya informed the Commission that for lunch they had a question mark for a DVD presentation. The name of the DVD is "Hold Your Breath". This is an actual case which follows the religious factors that come in to play, cultural facts, language barriers and social-economic issues that come in play with the healthcare encounter.

Commissioner Abu-rumman objects to viewing the "Hold Your Breath" DVD. It has nothing to do with cultural.

Special Assistant Awad said that she looked at a proof of the DVD. It focused more on the gentleman from Afghanistan who didn't speak any English and was going to his doctor's appointments by himself. Until his daughter came in and properly translated to him what was going on especially concerning the Chemo therapy since he was familiar with Chemo therapy as walking around with a pump in his arms. The doctor was trying to get the point across that he could take pills or other options.

Commissioner Sawaya said that the DVD will not be able to represent all Muslim patients but it is really an eye opener on how these dynamics of culture, religion and socio-economic really come in play in the health encounter. It is also the aspect of the health care system and providers cultural and their way of dealing with the patient.

Chair Hasan said that if the DVD is shown that the Commission needs to have a rebuttal here that religion teaches something different.

Commissioner Sawaya will have members look at the DVD and decide later.

Commissioner Miriam Galston asked if the DVD can be edited for ½ hour instead of the hour. Commissioner Sawaya said that she will be in touch with the person working on this and see if we could use certain segments.

Chair Hasan commended the Community Development Committee on their hard work with the Health Conference project. He informed the Commission that they have to take charge of these projects which is one of the reasons for the Commission. He asked the Commission to help in any way with this project. He would like the entire Commission on future discussions.

VII. Workforce Development

Commissioner Miriam Galston said the the Workforce Development Committee works on two issues, increasing Middle Eastern representation on commissions and boards and having more Middle Easterners in the workforce (paid jobs). Looking at the first there has been some effort to increase the usefulness of the website but discovered that Maryland State website is not very useful at all. For example if you click on homepage, not only is the Commissions not listed there but if you use commissions as a search item you get a couple hundred entries by various departments or culture. Commissioner Galston discussed a handout from Montgomery County about their commissions and boards vacancies. Two clicks away from the homepage there is a heading called volunteers and when you click on that you get to a page that says boards, committees and commissions we need you. She noted that when a position announcement comes from the State, you only have three weeks to respond. However, Montgomery County does it for the whole year. There is a listing of the terms of each board or commission member and you can look to see when there will be a vacancy. This enables people that want to make recommendations more time and the ability to structure. The Committee will request that the website be more user-friendly. Maybe a click away from the homepage would be helpful. Maybe even make a chart to include the whole year since these vacancies turnover on a predictable basis. In addition to website issues which could improve our presence on these commissions, they will be scheduling a meeting with Secretary Hitchcock to learn the nuts and bolts to be in a better position to assist. She also spoke about the Commission being notified about new commissions being formed. She particularly spoke about the New American Council formed and the Commission was not notified. Chair Hasan let the Commission know that

legislatively all the chairs of the ethnic commissions are members of the Council. They also asked him for some nominations and he has reached out to the community to serve on one of the committees in the Council which is workforce development and immigration services. He also heard that there is a new African Commission formed and populated with new commissioners.

Executive Director David Lee said that he does not know how many commissions Montgomery County has but the State of Maryland has hundreds of different commissions. He said that this is a big scope of project that it's not something that the Appointments Office which has a staff of four-five people can do. They go through thousands of resumes for all these different commissions. He suggested that maybe the Middle Eastern Commission or all the commissions can work on as a project with the help of interns.

Commissioner Galston said that was a great idea and this would benefit all the ethnic commissions. Commissioner Galston said that she received an offer from Mr. Joe Adler head of Human Resources in Montgomery County where one half of all of Maryland's immigrants. He also said that he will be pro-active with the Commission. He offered to have a workshop on how to apply for Montgomery County jobs effectively. We must have 15-20 people for the workshop. Mr. Adler said that his people will be willing to go where the people applicants are. She suggested that maybe doing it at a college for seniors. She also mentioned that there is a pilot project that has turned into a full blown project on assisting foreign trained residents of Montgomery County or anywhere in Maryland who wants to work in Montgomery County to get certified and licensed. The pilot program was in nursing. If you received your training in Middle Eastern countries, you still had to do a lot to get re-licensed here. They started a very intense program of screening and helping these people and they received government money to pay the fees for taking the test. They move 15-20 people into training programs and hospitals. Even the hospitals were putting up money since nurses is in short supply. The Commission needs to try to access what profession there is demand for and see if we could use their model. Chair Hasan said that he would give some feedback on this issue since he serves on the Governor's Higher Education Commission. He can get all that information for the Commission. Also they have funding available for what was just discussed. He will get all the information and the Workforce Development Committee can come up with an initiative.

Commissioner Hafeez informed the Commission that Montgomery County has a Middle Eastern Advisory Council to the County Executive. They did their first cultural competence for the county employees in the County Executive Office and more than sixty-five people attended. They introduced the history of Middle East and the reality today.

Chair Hasan reminded the Commission about the retreat in June where three committees were formed, Business Development, Community and Social Development and Workforce Development. He named the members of each

committee. He also noted that there needs to be a serious look at commissioners and if they are not participating and are not meeting the requirements then action needs to be taken. Chair Hasan said that an evaluation needs to be done for attendance and be addressed with the Secretary of Appointments. He also reviewed the short and long term goals discussed at the June retreat and what progress has been made.

Chair Hasan asked that the Commission continue to populate the database. At this time there are approximately 150 businesses on the website.

There was a request that the Health Conference be held in Baltimore at a central location. It was noted that it will be in Baltimore.

Chair Hasan again noted that the New Americans Council is differently looking for individuals to participate. If anyone want to be a part of the Council to please notify him.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 30, 2009.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.